The Southern PATRIOT

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Farmers' Fertilizer Co-op Strikes At Reaction In South Alabama

Down in the sand hill country of Southern Alabama, next to the Florida border and below the black belt, a small group of determined farmers are striking at the heart of one of the tightest, strongest international monopolies in America.

It's the Alabama Farmers Union and its members; and they've sized up the American Fertilizer Industry for their number One opposition.

Tired (and financially hurt) by the excessively high prices, low qualities and ever-present scarcities of fertilizers and plant foods, over one thousand farm families in three southern Alabama counties have joined themselves into the Alabama Farmers Union, and are currently building a strong and vigorous fertilizer cooperative of their own.

Salvation Through Fertilizer

The family farmers, both Negro and white, some owners, some tenants and some hardly more than laborers, have already been through some tough battles. Delayed by endless red-tape and rigmarole on the part of state regulations for cooperatives, the cooperative finally received the go-ahead signal to sell stock to its members to raise the necessary capital. As this is written volunteer salesmen among the farmers were tromping from farm to farm selling stock to their neighbor farmers, and were reporting great success.

Other cooperative ventures in the fertilizer mixing and manufacturing field have proven successful; and savings have amounted to as much as a third of the cost farmers pay annually on their fertilizer bill.

Aubrey Williams

The idea of a farmer-owned, farmer-controlled fertilizer cooperative (manufacturing) is mainly the brain child of Aubrey Williams, former high counsellor in the New Deal regime and now president of the Alabama Farmers Union. Williams was elected president of the Alabama Farmers Union for a two year term in 1946, and soon had inspired farm leaders in three states that the idea of a fertilizer cooperative was possible.

Leaders from Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee, after incorporating the cooperative for operation in three states, set Southern Alabama as the stage for the first effort. After completion of the plant, the cooperative staff plans to organize a similar venture in East Tennessee, and later in West Tennessee or Northern Alabama.

The venture is significant.

White-Negro Unity

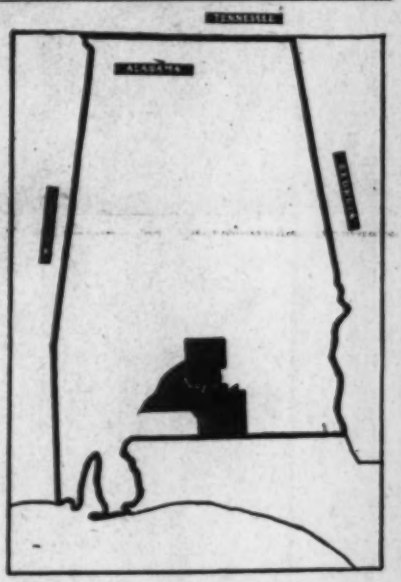
FIRST, because, with little money from each, it takes every farmer to make a go of something as expensive as the fertilizer manufacturing plant,—white farmers have had to go to their Negro brethren for support. Negro and white unity in a rural section, traditional area for greatest tension between the two, has resulted in this economic endeavor; likewise, the cooperative already has sold considerable quantities of fertilizer through the full-boxcar system, to cut costs, and it has taken both Negro and white farmers to fill a box car in some instances with their orders. (See cut, page 4.)

Political Action

SECOND, working and pulling together on one level has raised their aspiration sights to new heights: dirt farmers, usually poll-taxed away from the ballot box, are taking a renewed interest in political activity. Farmer-labor unity has been the result.

New Economic System

THIRD, a new consciousness of what can be achieved by the common man when he combines his strength with his brother, has resulted in farmers demanding greater participation in the fruits of the economy other than in fertilizer. Co-operative insurance, co-operative markets, cooperative feed mills, joint buying in wholesale lots, and a host of other collective activities has attracted their attention.



Deep in South Alabama, in rolling sandhill country, hundreds of small "forty-acre" farmers—owners, tenants and sharecroppers of both colors—are joining together in a Farmers Union Fertilizer cooperative, and setting a pattern of cooperative activity that promises well for the South's so-called "submarginal producer." Shown are Covington, Butler and Conecuh counties, in Alabama.

. . . Versus Monopoly

FOURTH, farmers, for a long time fed the line that their interests and those of Wall street are similar, are learning who their real enemies are; and who the real enemy within America is. The cry of "Communist" at the Farmers Union in South Alabama no longer carries any weight; for every farmer knows that not only himself

(Continued on page 8)

Learning The Co-Op Way...

A SCORE of community locals, organized around the country school districts, meet regularly once a month to hear about cooperative insurance, cooperative fertilizer, cooperative milk route, cooperative feed mills, cooperative machinery pools and social activity.

"THE LORD SPEAKS THROUGH THE FARMERS UNION," one local president told his members (above) in a Butler county Farmers Union meeting.

BELOW, Conecuh county farmers talk over home-grown locally-produced feed formulas, to get away from imported, monopoly-controlled commercial feeds.

—Photos by Willimetz)

They Bumped Hard Against The Chemical Industry

One of the body-blows delivered to the fertilizer monopolies by the Farmers Union Fertilizer Cooperative happened only last December, when co-op officials procured a quota of one thousand tons of natural phosphatic clay from a small concern struggling to exist in a virtually closed field.

Phosphate ore, in hard-rock, soft-rock and dirt and clay deposits, is one of the United States' most abundant natural resources. High grade phosphate ore occurs in considerable quantities in the West, and in Florida. For four decades, however, the Fertilizer Trust has been mixing sulphuric acid with the phosphate ore. By a combined propaganda and advertising campaign throughout the years, the I G Farben-controlled chemical industry has sought to convince farmers and dealers that phosphate ore must be mixed with sulphuric acid in order to make the phosphate available to the plant.

It is a proven fact, however, that in some cases the sulphuric acid is even harmful to good farming practices. But the industry can control the price of sulphuric acid; it cannot control the price of phosphate mined from extensive government reserves.

The Farmers Union fertilizer cooperative sold more than one thousand tons in the three Alabama counties where Farmers Union members live.

All the wrath of the industry, however, coupled with the disapproval of the Alabama Extension Service, a Big Business dominated government service knee deep in Alabama planter politics, did not deter the cooperative in its fight to hit the fertilizer industry the blow it fears the most.

For, not only can the Fertilizer Trust be kept from controlling the phosphate industry through sulphuric acid, but also, once Southern farmers learn the facts about phosphate in plentiful amounts, they will cease to use so much of the industry's two other plant food ingredients, particularly nitrogen.

The nitrogen industry is almost completely controlled by the Wall-street and I G Farben international cartel. Farmers pay almost four times as much per plant food unit for nitrogenous fertilizer as they pay for phosphate, yet **ONE UNIT OF PHOSPHATE WILL PRODUCE THREE UNITS OF NATURAL NITROGEN**, if planted under a cover-crop. Furthermore, under legumes and other crops, such as lupin, oats, wheat, peanuts, lespedeza, clover, the naturally produced nitrogen is longer lasting, and the deposits are contained in a natural sod and in a soil humus.

Since the Extension Service in Alabama spends practically no time with the little farmer, the Fertilizer Cooperative devotes considerable time and effort toward education on use of phosphate and cover crops, winter pasture, dairy farming, and other allied agricultural pursuits.

Already, the fertilizer industry is feeling the results in their fertilizer sales from the effect of this major strike at the heart of their system. Although TVA has led the battle in promoting phosphate as a fertilizer, the results of its educational program have been felt mostly in its own particular region.

What These Farmers Stand For

At their state convention in December, Alabama Farmers Union members declared themselves in favor of the following program:

Repeal the Poll tax and the Boswell amendment.

Political action by farmers, in cooperation with labor unions.

Better education for every child, regardless of race, creed or color.

Adequate national rural health program, including compulsory health insurance.

Increased old aged age pensions.

Increased Social Security system, and to include the farmer.

A TVA for production of fertilizer.

State financed produce markets.

SEGREGATION IN EDUCATION

A graphic and pictorial presentation, carefully documented, of one of the most glaring contradictions in American democracy. 15c each; $10 for 100; $50 per 1,000.

SOUTHERN CONFERENCE EDUCATIONAL FUND

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JAMES A. DOMBROWSKI
Editor

Prewar Concentration in Fertilizer Industry[1]

Largest 4 companies, 25% of U.S. output

Largest 8 companies, 42% of U.S. output

	Complete Fertilizer Plant Operated
American Agricultural	more than 20
Armour & Co.	" " 20
Virginia-Carolina	" " 20
Royster Guano	" " 15
Int'l. Mineral	" " 15
Swift & Co.	" " 15
Davison Chemical	" " 9
Baugh & Sons	" " 6

Eight largest fertilizer companies operate more than 120 complete fertilizer plants between them.

[1]Source: "Economic Concentration and World War II"

Some 1939 to 1945 Changes

Consumption of fertilizer in NPK* units (million tons)	1939	1.5
	1944	2.5
Value of fertilizer** (million dollars)	1939	$161.9
	1944	300.0
Net profits of 3 large companies*** (million dollars)	1939	$ 1.4
	1945	4.7

* Dep't. of Agriculture

** "Economic Concentration and World War II"

*** Moody's Manual of Industrials for American Agricultural Chemical Corp., Virginia-Carolina, and Int'l. Mineral.

These two tables from Facts For Farmers, Jan. 1947.

City Folks Have Stake, Too

Fertilizer is important not only to farmers; every consumer in town has a stake in the battle the farmers are waging in South Alabama in opposition to the Fertilizer Trust.

For, as plant nutrients are washed away from the soil, so human and animal food decreases in value; the food we all eat becomes less nutritious.

As one farmer put it: "You can be eating plenty and still starve."

For without sufficient calcium and phosphorous, for example, the entire musculo-skeletal system in both animal and men suffers. Well-fed children's teeth will show it first, as every farmer in the South already knows. Hogs, though fed bountifully, will not thrive unless on a balanced diet; and in turn their meat will not adequately feed human beings.

Like Cincinnatus...

John David Mott

He Laid Aside the Plow Share To Take Up the People's Fight

GUIDING SPIRIT and source of inspiration to over one thousand small farmers in three Southern Alabama counties is John David Mott, 52-year-old native Alabama farmer. Mott laid aside his plow share, turned his farty acre farm over to his war veteran son, and went "whole hawg" into organizing his fellow farmers one summer day in 1946.

In a record achievement of one year, he personally contacted 1500 dirt farmers "who actually till the soil," spoke at over one hundred meetings, and by dint of going night and day, attended conferences, meetings and pow-wows in two other states besides his own!

Says Mott: "The little people of the world are ready for something big; and by working and pulling together, whether we're farmers or factory workers, black or white, we'll get rid of selfishness and greed through cooperation together. Mott preaches against the poll tax, monopoly control of land and industry, low wages, inequality, and he campaigns for better education, expanded TVA's, and other progressive legislsation. He is the father of six children.

Through their Farmers Union Fertilizer Co-op, small family farmers are able to buy in the same way the big corporate farms purchase materials. Here Negro and white farmers unload forty tons of phosphate they bought together, each family buying from one to ten tons. Savings amounted to nearly $10 per ton. Nearly one thousand tons of this particular plant food alone was delivered in two counties through the cooperative.

Re-building Their Heritage...

While the Big Eight in the fertilizer-plant food industry jack prices higher and higher, the South's millions of small farmers know that they can supply the nation with an abundance of food . . . providing a plentiful supply of PHOSPHATE.

...from this

→

AT RIGHT — Badly-eroded hill land, unproductive, unprofitable, can be transformed into luxuriant pasture and feed land in a few short years with sufficient phosphate.

...to this

←

AT LEFT—A family farmer strides proudly across knee-high clover, a common cover and feed crop. Ten years ago, this land would hardly grow wild weeds; sold for around 15 dollars an acre. Today, it is worth over two hundred dollars an acre. Phosphate and cover crops explain the difference.

On The Air...

CRACKER-BARREL discussions around the country store were transplanted to a modern radio studio in Andalusia, Alabama, so that everybody could hear what the farmers were talking about. Sponsored by a local merchant, the cracker barrel talks are impromptu and without script. And the women sit in too. The program is a weekly FARMERS FORUM, under the direction of the Fertilizer cooperative's educational director.

Dairy Land Is Goal

Southern Alabama is a natural location for dairying and beef production.

Family labor, thick population, all-year grazing, and plentiful rain all add up to a real opportunity for South Alabama farmers through dairying and meat raising.

Experience in the last two decades in Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia show that many parts of the South will benefit greatly by a change over from row cropping and cotton farming to the dairy industry.

The Fertilizer Cooperative, by promoting phosphate farming and winter cover crops to build the soil and preserve it from erosion, is preparing the way toward that type of farmer farming.

Former SCHW Worker Directs Education

A young, indefatigable 21-year-old native Alabama farm girl, who formerly worked in the New York office of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, now directs the educational activities for the Farmers Union fertilizer cooperative.

She is Miss Vivian Thomas, native of Eclectic, Alabama, and Alabama University graduate. Deciding that her real work was to be among the "people from whom she sprang," Vivian left the Southern Conference to do "whatever I could for the farmers in my home state."

She runs a very busy Farmers Union office in Andalusia, and attends a local meeting nearly every night. But, added to that, are showing motion pictures in areas where some of the audience view their first motion picture; arranging for a weekly radio program; aiding local officers to develop their own program, and encouraging the women folk to take a more active part in elections, programs and farm planning.

Miss Vivian Thomas

Entertainment...

FARMERS UNION members are openly sympathetic to the CIO clothing workers in Andalusia, where low wages and long hours prevail for several thousand factory workers. The Farmers Union Christmas party was held in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (CIO) hall, and here factory-workers and farm-wives dress up the County Farmers Union president to act as Santa Claus. Negro and white children attended.

Behind 'Big Jim'

The farmers of this section joined with common people all over Alabama to demonstrate in a recent referendum, their support of Governor James Folsom's people's program.

They voted overwhelmingly to defeat an anti-Folsom piece of legislation, the so-called Self-Starter amendment. The amendment has been designed by foes of Folsom to block his program of mail-box roads, old age payments, re-apportionment, abolition of poll tax, and better rural schools for all.

Fertilizer and 'Free Enterprise'*

Seven companies control the production and sale of virtually all the basic NPK (nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potash) elements essential to the manufacture of commercial fertilizer.

Of the nearly 1,000 fertilizer manufacturers the four largest account for 25 percent and the eight largest for 42 percent of the total U. S. fertilizer production.

Nearly all of these 15 companies, together with numerous lesser fry, are now or have been in the recent past, under criminal indictment for illegal practices both with regard to the American and world markets.

Some 500 companies belong to the National Fertilizer Ass'n., indicted by a Federal Grand Jury February 1941 for violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Of these the largest are:

International Mineral & Chemical Corp., Virginia-Carolina Chemical Corp., American Agricultural Chemical Co., Armour & Co., Swift & Co., the Baugh & Sons group, Davidson Chemical Corp., and F. S. Royster Guano Co.

Between them, these 8 companies operate more than 120 complete fertilizer plants and account for 42 percent of total fertilizer production.

Monopoly Profits High

The Grand Jury indictment tells the ugly story of how the member companies of the Association conspired to abolish all price competition:

> **"They used uniform price lists, made arbitrary and artificial freight charges to their customers, set arbitrary prices for different states, spied on the dealers and agents for each other, made uniform agreements and discounts to the dealers and even allowed quantity discounts not on the basis of sales for individual companies, but on the total sales for member organizations, and worked out a system for maintaining company position in the industry which obviously involved an agreement on the division of the market as well as on price fixing."**

An idea of the profits in the fertilizer field is given by the returns reported for 1939 and 1945 by three of the largest companies for which figures are available: American Agricultural, Virginia-Carolina and International. Their net profits, after taxes, increased from $1,404,929 to $4,734,944, a jump of 237% in this period, while the quantity of fertilizer consumed nationally increased only 66%.

No Home-Mixing

Since the production of fertilizer consists mainly in mixing nitrogen, superphosphates and potash with some inert material in varying proportions—and this was literally all the service supplied by some of the companies—some farmers tried to save money by mixing their own fertilizer. However, according to the indictment, the NFA went to great lengths in its efforts to stop home-mixing. It persuaded the suppliers of nitrates and potash to refuse to sell to individual farmers or to cooperatives unless they were approved by the Association, and it required fertilizer producers, agents and dealers to refuse to sell to farmers suspected of doing their own mixing or else to sell them only at exorbitant prices.

Low Wages

Despite the wartime raise in the cost of living 2% of the 20,000 workers in the industry received less than 30c an hour in January 1943. 21% received between 30c and 40c per hour, and half of all workers received less than 47½c per hour for working in one of the most arduous and disagreeable of all industries.

Likewise important regional differences existed. While 55c per hour was the national average, it was 76½c in the North and only 45c in the South. Furthermore the Negro workers, who make up the largest proportion, averaged 27c per hour less than the white workers in the industry. The usual excuse of "excessive labor costs" can scarcely be used to justify the high prices of fertilizer.

After the indictment by a Federal Grand Jury and in the light of these facts it is not surprising that a little "face-lifting" was done by the NFA. On the one hand they have reorganized the NFA and on the other, they set up a new American Plant Food Council to try and present the fertilizer industry's case to the public and the farmers in a different light.

*Condensed from an article by Don Lester in FACTS FOR FARMERS, published by Farm Research, 39 Cortland St., New York 7, N. Y.

Fertilizer Co-op . . .

(Continued from page 1)

but his neighbors for miles around are men of Christian heart, and of good will toward all; that the cry against them comes from the monied interests which have so long robbed them of their heritage.

"Report Of A Report Of The House Committee On Un-American Activities"

"Dr. Walter Gellhorn's analysis of the attack on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare by the Committee on Un-American Activities may well play the same role in today's constitutional liberties crisis as was played by the book about the Sacco-Venzetti case by Professor Felix Frankfurter, then Professor of Law at Harvard University, now Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States," said Dr. Mitchell Franklin, noted civil law scholar and Professor of Law at Tulane University.

Dr. Franklin had just read "Report of a Report of the House Committee on Un-American Activities" by Dr. Walter Gellhorn, Professor of Law, Columbia University, in the HARVARD LAW REVIEW. Careful analysis of the tactics used by the Committee on Un-American Activities exposes the threat to the civil rights of every American. Dr. Gellhorn concludes: "The report demonstrates, not that the Southern Conference is a corrupt organization, but that the Committee has been either intolerably incompetent or designedly intent upon publicizing mis-information.

"We have sought to appraise the report of the Committee which denounced the Conference. That report, it is submitted, is a document which discredits its authors rather than the organization it sought to destroy. The accusations that the Southern Conference is insincere—that is, that its asserted interest in southern welfare is but a disguise to mark its service to the Soviet Union—are not founded on credible evidence. From semi-truths the Committee has drawn conclusions which would be strained even if the factual assertions of the report were beyond challenge . . .

"The Committee on Un-American Activities has seemingly been unwilling to tolerate those whose estimates of current problems do not match its own. Instead, it has, as in the present report, sought to intimidate or destroy by attacks upon individual reputations. Persons so attacked can rarely defend themselves against accusers who enjoy a legislative immunity and are therefore not answerable for even malicious or grossly careless misstatements."

Reprints of this report are available from the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, 808 Perdido Street, New Orleans 12, Louisiana.

Enclose 15c to cover costs.